Finland and The United States: Education Uncovered

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

The Nordic country Finland has reformed their education system to outperform other countries year after year. All the while, their students spend less time in school and less time on homework. Meanwhile, the United States has endured hardship after hardship and struggles to stick to one educational reform. American students spend hours in school and hours on homework after school. Yet, they still fall short in comparison to other countries, especially Finland. This thesis analyzes the major differences (and some similarities) between Finland and the United States: government role in education, factors in the classroom, and teacher preparation and respect.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my mentor and practicum teacher, Barbara Pavey. Thank you for pushing me, supporting me, and continuously being there for me throughout this thesis and throughout my student teaching.

I'd also like to thank my mom and dad for supporting me and helping me with all of my technological issues. I could not have done it without you!

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Process Analysis Statement

The following thesis analyzes key factors within the United States' education system and Finland's education system. Finland's education system has always been of interest to me. My education classes at Ball State University not only taught me how our education system runs and operates in the United States, but they also dipped into Finland's education system. Before beginning my preparation for this thesis, I knew very little about the system Finland had created, but I knew enough to spark my interest. I also felt that researching methods that other countries use would help me to further my knowledge of education in general and provide me with an interesting perspective within my own career as an educator.

I began my research by reading journals that discussed the United States and Finland separately. Throughout my research process, I noted key factors within each education system that made the systems innately different. By identifying key factors for each education system, I started to think about what points of comparison I could make. This led me to the three important sections within my thesis: Government Role in Education, In the Classroom, and Teacher Preparation and Respect. These areas are where the United States and Finland vary the most. After developing the three areas I wanted to focus on, I researched them in more depth by consulting scholarly journals, federal documents from both countries, and information that both education systems had released directly. This research allowed me to further compare the education in the two countries and find ways that they are not only different, but the same as well. I then used these comparisons to draw conclusions about the ways these two countries approach education. What can the United States do to overcome their current struggles? Can the United States simply duplicate Finland's education system?

While the comparisons are extremely interesting, I believe the process of writing this thesis taught me more than just the results I found. I have learned about who I am as an educator and what ideals I want to instill in my own classroom. The United States may be going through struggles within education, but that does not stop me from providing the best education to my students with the resources that I have. Writing this thesis while going through my practicum and student teaching experiences has taught me more about education than I could have ever imagined.

I believe this thesis is of value to anyone who shares my concerns with our current education system. That is, our education system has areas that are lacking and is in desperate need of change. Change requires self-reflection and may also require a different perspective. This thesis aims at providing an overall look at the components of the United States' education system while making a comparison to the same components in Finland's education system. In the end, it is crucial that our educators are believing in positive change throughout the country while also believing in our students. They are the future of our country and it is our job to prepare them for their future endeavors to the best of our ability. I believe that learning more about how other countries are succeeding can provide valuable lessons that we can apply to changes within our own country.

Introduction

In his March 12, 1983, radio address to the nation, President Ronald Reagan called for improvements to the United States' education system. Within his list of recommendations, Reagan briefly described his view on education; a view that education systems across the world aspire to hold: "We've always had a love affair with learning in this country. America is a melting pot, and education has been a mainspring for our democracy and freedom, a means of providing gifts of knowledge and opportunity to all citizens, no matter how humble their background, so they could climb higher, help build the American dream and leave a better life for those who follow."

Reagan's view of education from 1983 is one that many educators have today. Educators aspire for equity, equality, and opportunity for all students. But sometimes, an education system can prevent educators from reaching their highest goals through policies, funding, and political motives. When looking at education systems across the globe, it is evident that no system is perfect. However, some systems have proven to be better than others at achieving the view that Ronald Reagan clearly envisioned in 1983.

Finland, for example, has created an education system that leaves educators around the globe in awe. Countries aspire to be like Finland and model their reforms after the educational policies in place in Finland. The United States, on the other hand, tends to struggle with developing a strong education system. With ever-changing policies and little visible progress, it seems as though the U.S. is stuck in where to move. This paper will examine the components of both the United States' education system and Finland's education system. What can the United States improve on, and how can they get to the level that Finland has achieved?

Section I: Government Role in Education

The role that governments play in an education system can have a major impact on how schools, students, and teachers interact. The following section will overview the role that the government plays in the United States and Finland. Topics discussed will include education reforms, funding, and the relevance of charter schools and private schools.

Education Reform in the United States

In 1983, President Ronald Reagan called for major education reform through a report titled *A Nation at Risk.* The report not only drew attention to the importance of the public schools, but it also opened the public's eyes to shocking statistics that showed little success of the U.S. education system. The following statistics, labeled as "Indicators of Risk," are just a few of many listed in the report:

- Some 23 million American adults are functionally illiterate by the simplest tests of everyday reading, writing, and comprehension.
- International comparisons of student achievement, completed a decade ago, reveal that on 19 academic tests American students were never first or second and, in comparison with other industrialized nations, were last seven times.
- The College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) demonstrate a virtually unbroken decline from 1963 to 1980. Average verbal scores fell over 50 points and average mathematics scores dropped nearly 40 points. (United States. National Commission on Excellence in Education.)

The above statistics drew light to alarming facts: not only was the United States failing in comparison to other industrialized countries, but they were also declining in comparison to themselves from year to year. To combat this, the report suggested that education reform

should be aimed at creating a Learning Society: a society that allows members of all ages to "stretch their minds to full capacity" and promotes educational opportunities that extend beyond a school environment (United States. National Commission on Excellence in Education.).

In 1989, a group of politicians came together and proposed a solution to the education crisis. "Goals 2000" outlined eight educational goals that aimed to improve and address problems within the public-school system. However, these eight goals did not become law until 1994. While this "law" was posed as optional to the states, it provided federal funds as an incentive, which drew 22 states into the program by 2001. As with many reform attempts, requirements were hidden in the fine print, stating that states should "submit grant proposals, submit 'improvement plans' for the U.S. Secretary of Education's approval, and receive penalties for failure to comply with their own improvement plans" ("The History of Goals 2000"). Even further, the Goals 2000 program slyly attempted to shift control of the schools from the local level to the federal level, giving Washington D.C. more governance over the public schools.

In 2001, Goals 2000 was replaced with No Child Left Behind. President George W. Bush made education his top priority by enacting this standards-based reform. Bush stated, "Taken together, these reforms express my deep belief in our public schools and their mission to build the mind and character of every child, from every background, in every part of America" (United States, Congress 5). In essence, Bush's goal was for every student to receive a quality education, leaving no child behind in the process. The main focus of No Child Left Behind was accountability. All students were required to reach high academic standards, no matter their ability level. To make sure schools and teachers were pushing their

students to reach these high standards, schools were required to administer standardized tests annually in reading and math to grades three through eight. Bush believed that giving these standardized tests yearly would provide vital information to both the parents and school systems on student achievement and progress.

While this idea seemed appropriate in theory, the punishments imposed on schools which struggled to meet high standards not only placed extremely high stakes on standardized testing, but also pushed schools farther away from reaching already unrealistic goals. Bush stated, "The Secretary of Education will be authorized to reduce federal funds available to a state for administrative expenses if a state fails to meet their performance objectives and demonstrate results in academic achievement" (United States, Congress 10). In turn, this caused schools with high poverty levels and low socioeconomic statuses in particular to receive less and less funding. However, these schools *needed* more funding in order to improve the school district as well as to provide necessary resources to improve student achievement.

President Bush's goal was for 100% of students in the United States to reach proficiency by 2014 no matter their race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. Diane Ravitch, a historian of education, states, "100 percent proficiency is an impossible goal; no nation in the world has ever achieved this, nor has any other nation ever passed legislation to punish its schools for not reaching an unattainable goal" (Ravitch 12). As schools got closer to the 2014 deadline, the stakes continually heightened. Ravitch reports that some schools were spending 20% of the entire school year solely on preparation for testing, with some districts starting testing as early as pre-kindergarten just to make sure their students were ready (13). While some students may do extremely well on standardized tests, there will always be students that

struggle with meeting the proficiency level. Therefore, it was completely unrealistic to expect *every* student to reach proficiency. George W. Bush had good intentions with No Child Left Behind; however, while teachers should hold their students to high standards, the standards within the act were simply far too high.

The election of President Barack Obama in 2007 brought hope to the United States' education system. However, after he took office in 2008, hopes were crushed by his Race to the Top program. While most thought that No Child Left Behind went overboard on standardized testing, Race to the Top heightened high-stakes testing even more. Congress set aside $5 billion of the education budget solely for the competition-based Race to the Top program. In order for states to have a chance at receiving a part of the $5 billion, they were not only required to adopt a new set of common standards, known as the Common Core State Standards, but also required to expand their charter schools, improve low-performing schools (using whatever methods necessary – no matter how drastic), and evaluate effectiveness of teachers, using scores from standardized testing. While educators and parents were hoping that the amount of standardized testing would reduce with the election of Barack Obama, the opposite actually happened. Not only were students being tested more, but the stakes attached rose higher and higher.

The U.S. Department of Education stated four objectives as their main goals for state reforms. States were required to reform their education systems as follows in order to be eligible for a portion of the $5 billion:

- Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy;

- Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction;
- Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and
- Turning around our lowest-achieving schools. ("Race to the Top Fund")

Although Race to the Top succeeded in having states adopt various educational reforms, the reforms were not necessarily helpful or beneficial to students, teachers, and administrators. Race to the Top pushed standardized testing even further, and encouraged states to adopt the "Common Core" – a list of standards for Mathematics and English for all grade levels. The combination of standardized tests and Common Core pushed the idea of "teaching to the test." Quickly, teachers and administrators were doing anything they could to improve the test scores of their students – as their careers now depended on it. Many schools turned into corporations that valued test scores more than the development and growth of their students.

The election of President Donald Trump in 2016 brought along a new executive cabinet, including Betsy DeVos, the Secretary of Education. The appointment of DeVos was a controversial topic in the United States. Educators and leaders around the country were wary of DeVos's qualifications for the Secretary of Education position. DeVos showed little evidence of interaction with the public schools while pushing her strong belief in private and charter schools. Many feared that her lack of knowledge of the public school systems would be a disservice to our nation's youth. Senator Elizabeth Warren released a statement expressing her concerns following the nomination of DeVos, "Mrs. DeVos's record on K-12 education has been focused on using her vast fortune to push her own ideology on hardworking families that are just trying to get their kids a decent education in public schools. Not only are her ideas completely

uninformed by experience with public schools, but the evidence is clear that her privatization theories are bad for students." Despite the best efforts of passionate Congressmen and women and educators around the country, Vice President Mike Pence became the first Vice President to break a tie vote for a Cabinet nominee. Betsy DeVos was confirmed as Secretary of Education on February 7, 2017.

DeVos's beliefs are rooted in private and charter school education. DeVos stated at an education conference in 2015, "Let the education dollars follow each child, instead of forcing the child to follow the dollars. This is pretty straightforward. And it's how you go from a closed system to an open system that encourages innovation. People deserve choices and options." The future of America's education system is moving towards school choice. DeVos believes that students deserve the right to go to the school they want to go to, even if they do not have the money for it. School vouchers make this possible, but also take away money from the public schools. Thus, the school choice movement has been a point of controversy in the United States.

It is clear that the United States has tried to enact a multitude of reforms. These reforms have had limited success, with the main focus being on standardized testing and "racing" for funding. The United States has yet to find the type of education reform that is most successful and equal for all students and educators.

Education Reform in Finland

Finland is known for its revolutionary and successful education system. However, the Finns were not always leaders when it comes to education. After World War Two, Finland went through political and economic changes. Educational changes followed suit to match the ideals and principles that were now being upheld.

Up to the late 1960s, students in Finland had three options: drop out of school after a few years of basic education, attend a grammar school, or attend a municipal school. The grammar school option most closely represented the education that most students get today. The municipal school, however, offered additional years of schooling with vocational school opportunities ("Finland: Slow and Steady Reform" 119). While these options were ideal for a while, educators and politicians came to agree that a more comprehensive schooling would be best not only for students, but for the future of the nation. In 1968, Parliament created The School System Act of 1968. This act pushed the idea of comprehensive schooling and called for a complete restructure of how schools operated (Aho et al. 5). While the act was signed in 1968, it was not implemented until 1972, with the last province implementing the system in 1977 ("Finland: Slow and Steady Reform" 119). However, this was not an easy change for the educators, students, and citizens of Finland. Pasi Sahlberg, Director of the Center for International Mobility and Co-operation, stated in an interview regarding this change, "In the early 1970s policy makers realized that if we were to successfully implement this very ambitious comprehensive school reform, bringing all Finnish students into the same school and expecting them to master the same curriculum, it would require not only different systems of support but a very different level of understanding and knowledge from each and every teacher" ("Finland: Slow and Steady Reform" 121). This major reform change called for the entire community to support all students and teachers.

However, schools reached a dilemma once students completed their comprehensive schooling, around the age of 16. While the reform brought all students to the same level, it still left them with a choice when moving on to lower secondary and secondary school. Again, these students chose either an academic route or a vocational route that led them down completely different paths. The academic route opened doors to colleges and the universities while the

vocational route did not have opportunities for further education. Thus, in the mid 1980s, the government decided that all students, no matter the route they chose, would receive the same basic certification that would allow them to be eligible for any upper-secondary educational route (Aho et al. 7).

The need for curriculum change was identified in the 1960s, but curriculum reform is what made the merger of the two routes possible in the 1980s. By 1970, teachers and policy makers had come up with general principles and syllabi for grade levels and subjects. These documents are relevant today as they represent the goals of Finland's education system, as stated more clearly in later legislation (Aho et al. 43-44). This led to conflict, however, as the National Board of General Education set the curriculum while the legislature chose the subjects. To solve this problem, "Parliament continued to decide the basic components of the education system. The government determined how much instructional time to allot to each subject as well as the general goals of education, while the National Board of General Education's experts prepared and decided on curriculum" (Aho et al. 44).

Almost two decades after the merger of secondary school options, Finnish legislation put into effect the Basic Education Act in 1998. This act is notable across the world, as it won the Silver Future Policy Award in 2015 in Geneva. This award recognizes the guaranteeing of access to a high quality and equal education to *all* children. The Basic Education Act summarizes the goals of Finland's education system. Further, the act not only outlines what comprehensive school should look like in Finland, but it also gives rights to all students. For example, the Act states the following:

- Section 2, 1: The purpose of education referred to in this Act is to support pupils' growth into humanity and into ethically responsible membership of society and to provide them

with knowledge and skills needed in life. Furthermore, the aim of pre-primary education, as part of early childhood education, is to improve children's capacity for learning.

- Section 24, 1: The pupil's work load in basic education must be such as to allow him or her enough time for rest, recreation and hobbies over and above the time spent in school, school travel and homework.
- Section 29, 1: A pupil participating in education shall be entitled to a safe learning environment.
- Section 31a, 1: A pupil shall be entitled to free pupil welfare necessary for participation in education. Pupil welfare means action promoting and maintaining good learning, good mental and physical health and social well-being, and conditions conducive to these ("Basic Education Act").

The act stresses the importance of education while also stressing the importance of students' safety and well-being. The Basic Education Act is still in effect today, with amendments being added continuously.

How does Finland's Basic Education Act compare to the legislation enacted by the United States? First, Finland's legal documents are more student-centered than punishment-based. These documents give rights to all students and make health and safety a priority. In turn, the community in Finland also places a value on health and safety. In contrast, most of the legislation put in place by the United States has been indirectly focused on punishment for schools and districts which are underperforming. For example, both NCLB and Race to the Top placed extreme emphasis on standardized testing, with heavy consequences for schools which failed to raise their scores to a certain level. In a way, the United States seems to have the idea that outlandish consequences to teachers and schools and over-testing students will automatically

solve any and all problems with their education system. However, it is clear that the United States is putting emphasis on the wrong things. There should be more emphasis on giving basic rights to students and giving schools and districts the tools they need to succeed, rather than stripping them. Failing schools will never succeed by having funding and resources taken away from them. Instead, they will continue fall back further and further while the high performing schools, the ones with plenty of resources and funding, will continue to rise.

School Funding in the United States

The following section focuses on how public schools are funded in the United States. As mentioned previously, a big portion of funding from the federal government is based on student performance on standardized tests. However, funding also comes from the local and state levels. Figure 1.1 illustrates the roles that all three levels of government play in the funding of public schools (Cornman 4).

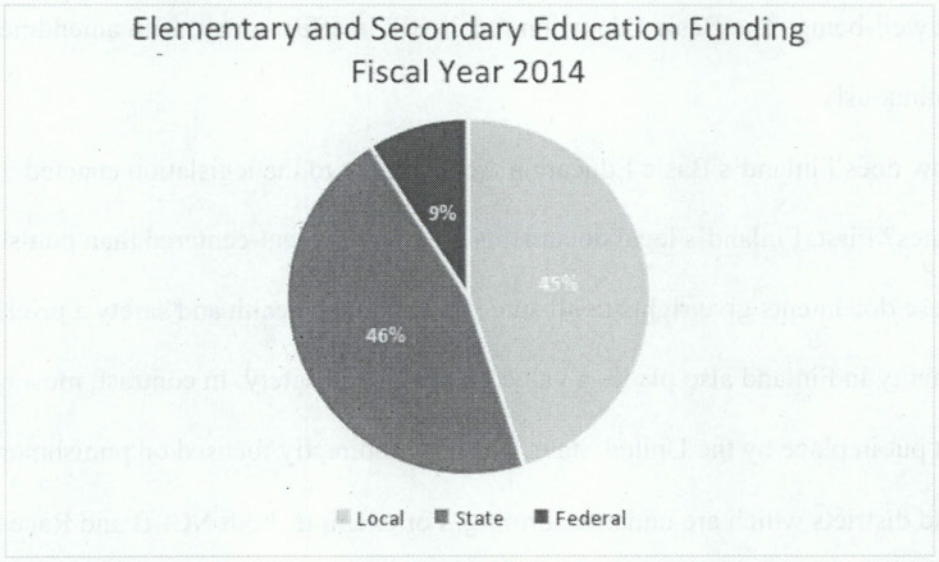


Figure 1.1

Local Level

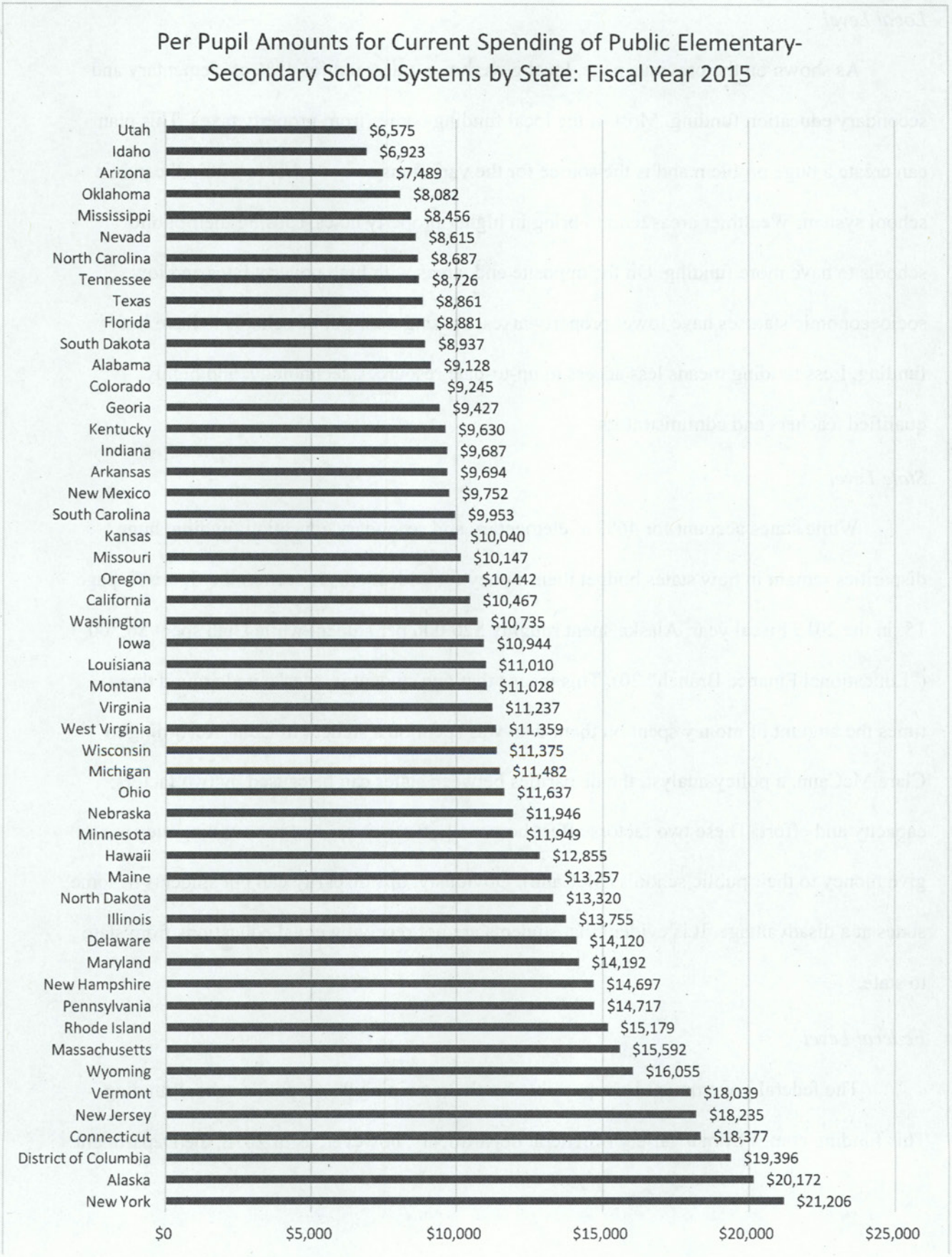
As shown on the previous page, local governments account for 45% of elementary and secondary education funding. Most of the local funding comes from property taxes. This plan can create a huge problem and is the source for the variations across schools within the public school system. Wealthier areas tend to bring in higher property taxes, causing their public schools to have more funding. On the opposite end, areas with high poverty rates and low socioeconomic statuses have lower property taxes, causing their public schools to have less funding. Less funding means less access to up-to-date resources, technology, and highly qualified teachers and administrators.

State Level

While states account for 46% of elementary and secondary education funding, huge disparities remain in how states budget their money for education. As seen in the figure on page 15, in the 2015 Fiscal year, Alaska spent roughly $20,000 per student while Utah spent $6,500 ("Educational Finance Branch" 20). This means that one student in Alaska had around three times the amount of money spent on them than was spent on a student in Utah. According to Clare McCann, a policy analyst, the disparities between states can be caused by two factors: capacity and effort. These two factors affect how well off states are and how willing they are to give money to their public schools (McCann). Obviously, this disparity can put students in some states at a disadvantage. It is evident that students are not receiving equal educations from state to state.

Federal Level

The federal government is responsible for the remaining 9% in public school funding. This funding comes from a variety of federal departments; however, as of 2016, the Department


Per Pupil Amounts for Current Spending of Public Elementary-Secondary School Systems by State: Fiscal Year 2015
Utah $6,575
Idaho $6,923
Arizona $7,489
Oklahoma $8,082
Mississippi $8,456
Nevada $8,615
North Carolina $8,687
Tennessee $8,726
Texas $8,861
Florida $8,881
South Dakota $8,937
Alabama $9,128
Colorado $9,245
Georia $9,427
Kentucky $9,630
Indiana $9,687
Arkansas $9,694
New Mexico $9,752
South Carolina $9,953
Kansas $10,040
Missouri $10,147
Oregon $10,442
California $10,467
Washington $10,735
Iowa $10,944
Louisiana $11,010
Montana $11,028
Virginia $11,237
West Virginia $11,359
Wisconsin $11,375
Michigan $11,482
Ohio $11,637
Nebraska $11,946
Minnesota $11,949
Hawaii $12,855
Maine $13,257
North Dakota $13,320
Illinois $13,755
Delaware $14,120
Maryland $14,192
New Hampshire $14,697
Pennsylvania $14,717
Rhode Island $15,179
Massachusetts $15,592
Wyoming $16,055
Vermont $18,039
New Jersey $18,235
Connecticut $18,377
District of Columbia $19,396
Alaska $20,172
New York $21,206
$0
$5,000
$10,000
$15,000
$20,000
$25,000

of Education accounts for more than 50% of this funding (Department of Education). Other departments that contribute to the funding of public schools include the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Commerce, and the Department of Health and Social Services. The federal government distributes its dollars mostly through competitive grant programs (McCann). Test scores play a major role in competitive grant programs, such as Race to the Top and No Child Left Behind. Similar to state per-pupil spending, the federal government varies the funding it gives from state to state. For example, South Dakota receives around 16% of the federal education budget while New Jersey only receives around 4% (McCann).

The disparities in public school funding come from the local, state, and federal governments. For example, a student in a high-poverty city will most likely receive an education with substantially less money than a student in a low-poverty city. This disparity greatens if the student in a high-poverty city lives in a state that receives less funding from the federal government. Overall, students are not receiving equal amounts of funding towards their education. Disparities in funding result in disparities in teacher quality, resources, and opportunities.

School Funding in Finland

Funding for public education in Finland is divided between the municipal and federal governments. More specifically, the municipal government accounts for 40% of school funding while the state governments account for the remaining 60% ("Finland: Governance and Accountability"). The funding for basic education falls under municipal services that receive statutory government transfers, which are transfers of government money to individuals, businesses, etc. In this case, the transfers come from the government to school corporations. The amount of the transfer is based on the number of 6-15 year olds living in each municipality. Pasi

Sahlberg stated the following in an interview with the Washington *Post*, "Finnish schools are funded based on a formula guaranteeing equal allocation of resources to each school regardless of location or wealth of its community" (Strauss). Compared to the U.S. education system, there are few disparities from school to school when it comes to funding. On average, Finland spends USD$8,812 per student for primary education and USD$10,387 per student for secondary education ("Education Resources"). Further, each municipality has the right to determine how the money is distributed ("Finnish Education"). Similar to the funding of basic education, secondary education is funded based on the number of students reported by the school.

The biggest difference between the funding of Finnish schools and that of American schools is the variation in the money spent per pupil. While the spending per pupil for Finnish students is comparative to funding for students from California and Oregon, there is less variation from school to school or state to state. Funding in Finland is mostly based on numbers while funding in the United States is based on a pupil's location and test scores. Finland's funding has a better chance of ensuring that all students have access to an equal education, no matter their location or socioeconomic status. This is because the Finnish government ensures that funds are *actually* spread across schools equally, based on the number of students enrolled. However, the United States' allocation of funds based on location gives an advantage to those students who live in wealthy areas. They have better access to advanced resources, leaving those with a lower socioeconomic status at a disadvantage. Race to the Top and No Child Left Behind aimed at providing equal education for all students, but instead continued to encourage the gap between the funding of schools.

Relevance of Private and Charter Schools in the United States

As mentioned previously, the appointment of Betsy DeVos as the United States Secretary of Education brought forth views that encouraged students to enroll in private schools and charter schools. Betsy DeVos has expressed her support for school choice throughout her appointment and her term as SOE. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the United States has 33,619 private schools, which make up 25% of all schools. Most private schools are organized around specific religions, with 41.3% of them being Catholic schools ("Private School Universe Survey"). As for charter schools, there were 5,997 as of the 2012-2013 school year ("Charter Schools"). Enrollment for charter schools has continued to increase in popularity, with enrollment tripling over the past ten years.

In the United States, most private schools are funded independently, meaning no government support is given. Thus, going to a private school can be expensive for students and families, since funding is reliant on tuition, grants, and donations. However, since private schools are not tied to the state or federal government for funding, they have freedom when it comes to choosing their curriculum and students. They are allowed to incorporate religious education if they choose to. They are also not obligated to follow state and national standards. Lastly, private schools can choose who they want their students to be. Nevertheless, most private schools are accredited, meaning they meet standards and their staff and programs undergo a review every so often (Pascual).

Charter schools are a recent trend in the United States. The idea rose in the late 1980s and has continued to gain popularity ever since (Karp). It does not cost students money out of pocket to attend a charter school, and these schools cannot discriminate against students (Pascual). Charter schools are also funded by the government and are required to follow curriculum

standards. The main difference lies in who runs the school. Most charter schools are run independently by companies or corporations. Thus, enrollment space is limited and students have to go through an application process to be admitted. Considering their connection to companies and corporations, charter schools often receive criticism for being profit-driven. Critics worry about charter schools prioritizing money and school growth over the education of their students.

The option of "school choice" has caused controversy in the United States, with the appointment of DeVos at the heart of it. DeVos calls charter schools an "extension of public education" while Lily Eskelsen García, president of the National Education Association, opposes by saying, "We believe that the chance for the success of a child should not depend on winning a charter lottery, being accepted by a private school, or living in the right ZIP code" (Grinberg and Kessler). The root of the controversy boils down to the allocation of the funds. DeVos has an ultimate goal of implementing a voucher system for all students. The voucher system allows students to attend the school of their choice, whether that be a public, private, or charter school. In simple terms, if students want to attend a school other than a public school, they are given a "voucher" that gives them money from public school funding to go towards the cost of a private education. Critics of the voucher program argue that such a program takes money away from public schools, especially the schools that need all the money that they can get. Critics also argue that the program encourages segregation of schools. In low socioeconomic communities, many parents of Caucasian students send their children to private schools or charter schools, so that they do not have to be in a disadvantaged public school system. In result, public schools are left with large minority populations with parents who cannot afford to send their children to private schools. On the other hand, private schools are described as being "overly white." The voucher system further encourages this segregation and increases enrollment of more privileged students

in private and charter schools while poorer students remain in public schools that have lost funding through the voucher system.

DeVos's support of the voucher system guarantees that private schools and charter schools will remain an important part of the United States' education system in the future. There is no denying that school choice can segregate and create separate but unequal school systems. However, teachers and educators of public school children around the country fear for what this will do to the public school system. Stan Karp, a teacher of 30 years, states in *Charter Schools and the Future of Public Education*, "At the level of state and federal education policy, charters are providing a reform cover for eroding the public school system and an investment opportunity for those who see education as a business rather than a fundamental institution of democratic civic life." After DeVos's term as Secretary of Education, future administrations will hold the power to change what public, private, and charter schools will look like.

Relevance of Private and Charter Schools in Finland

Compared to the United States, Finland has very few private schools. In fact, edufile.info reports that only .8% of schools in Finland are private. Further, the atmosphere and technicalities of private schools vary greatly from those of private schools in the United States. For example, private schools in Finland receive the same amount of funding from the government as public schools do. However, this means that private schools are required to abide by the same standards and rules that the government sets for public schools. Private schools are held to the same curriculum standards and have to be inclusive of all students. Where private schools in the United States have the power to discriminate against students, private schools in Finland are not allowed to be selective due to race, age, disability, etc. ("Finland: Governance and

Accountability"). Most private schools in Finland are religious and provide some sort of religious curriculum and integration.

Charter schools are non-existent in Finland. In fact, private schools in Finland are a better comparison to charter schools in the United States. Both receive federal funding, have to abide by national standards, and cannot discriminate against students when accepting them into their schools. The low number of private schools in Finland represents a greater support of the public school system. Finnish citizens seem to have few problems with the public schools and thus there has not been a push for a voucher program or school choice movement. Those in private schools are receiving the same education as those in the public schools.

Section II: In the Classroom

The policies and programs put in place have varying affects in classrooms in both the United States and Finland. The following section will go into depth on how schools operate at the classroom level, including standardized testing, national standards and curriculum, and the classroom environment.

Standardized Testing in the United States

Before diving into details of standardized testing, it is important to define what standardized testing is in the United States. According to edglossary.net, standardized testing is "any form of test that (1) requires all test takers to answer the same questions, or a selection of questions from common bank of questions, in the same way, and that (2) is scored in a 'standard' or consistent manner." Standardized testing can be done for any of the following reasons: to assess readiness levels, for entrance into universities, to fulfill graduation requirements, or to receive grant scholarships. It is common to find a majority of multiple-choice questions on a standardized test in the United States, with separate sections for writing and short answers. As

mentioned previously, standardized testing is incorporated at almost every grade level and given multiple times per year in the United States. This testing is in compliance with policies such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top.

The following statistics come from a report titled *Student Testing in America's Great City Schools: An Inventory and Preliminary Analysis,* from the Council of the Great City Schools, an organization of the nation's largest urban public schools. These statistics represent the frequency and prevalence of standardized testing in schools across the country:

- In the 2014-15 school year, 401 unique tests were administered across subjects in the 66 Great City School systems.
- Students in the 66 districts were required to take an average of 112.3 tests between pre-K and grade 12. (This number does not include optional tests, diagnostic tests for students with disabilities or English learners, school-developed or required tests, or teacher designed or developed tests.)
- The average amount of testing time devoted to mandated tests among eighth-grade students in the 2014-15 school year was approximately 4.22 days or 2.34 percent of school time.
- The average student in these districts will typically take about eight standardized tests per year, e.g., two NCLB tests (reading and math), and three formative exams in two subjects per year (Hart 9).

Not only are students tested a significant amount, but there are also extremely high stakes attached to these tests. For schools, a portion of funding depends on student performance. For teachers, their jobs and pay could be impacted, based on the test scores of their students. For students, scores affect their school environment, their eligibility to graduate, and their entrance

into universities. Although standardized testing alone only takes up around 2% of the school year, the preparation for these tests tends to dominate a large portion of the school year. The preparation time for standardized tests varies from school to school and district to district. While some schools have entire periods devoted to content review over material on standardized tests, some only provide weekly review sheets that are done outside of class. Figure 1.2 shows a teacher-created calendar for a spring semester in an Algebra II class at Anderson High School in Anderson, Indiana. Throughout the semester, teachers and students have only four weeks that are test free and preparation free. For two weeks before ISTEP, the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress, teachers are required to put their curriculum on hold and focus on content that students will be tested on. For the remaining weeks of the semester, teachers and students must adjust their schedules based on a portion of students being pulled for standardized testing.

Week	Testing Window/days out	A2 content
1/8 – 1/12		Ch 5 Sections 1-4
1/15 – 1/19	NWEA (9th & 10th)/MLK, Jr ~ No School	Quiz (Ch 5 Sec 1-4)/ Ch 5 Sections 5 & 6
1/22 – 1/26	NWEA	Ch 5 Sec7 – 8/ Ch 5 Test
1/29 – 2/2		Ch 6 Sec 1 – 4
2/5-2/9		Ch 6 Sec 4-6/Quiz (Ch 6 Sec 1-4)
2/12-2/16	Accuplacer & 10 day count down	9 day count down
2/19-2/23	Accuplacer & 10 day count down President's day ~ No School	9 day count down
2/26-3/2	ISTEP Part 1(Soph & Jr)	Proctoring this week
3/5-3/9	ISTEP Part 1(Soph & Jr)	Review Ch 6 Sec 1-6; Ch 6 Section 7
3/12/3/16	Accuplacer	Review Ch 6 Sec Ch 6 Test
3/19 – 3/30	SPRING BREAK	No School
4/2 – 4/6	10 Day Count down	10 day count down
4/9 – 4/13	10 Day count down	10 day count down
4/16 – 4/20	ISTEP Part 2(Soph & Jr)	Proctoring this week
4/23 – 4/27	ISTEP Part 2(Soph & Jr)/ECA (seniors)	Ch 7 Sec 2 – 4
4/30 – 5/4	ECA (seniors)/AP exams	Ch 7 Sec 4 – 6
5/7 – 5/11	ECA (seniors)/NWEA (9th & 10th)/AP Exams	Ch 7 Sec 6/ TEST
5/14 – 5/18	NWEA (9th & 10th)	Ch 8 Sec 1 – 5 (Omit Sec 3 & 4)
5/21 – 5/25		Ch 8 Sec 6/ Test
5/28 – 6/1	Final Exam Week ~ No School Monday ~ Memorial Day	

Figure 1.2

As shown previously, the funding across American schools is not equal. Thus, not all students are receiving the same quality of education, but they are still required to take

standardized tests and are held to the same level of achievement. Essentially, the United States is administering standardized tests to a non-standardized system.

Standardized Testing in Finland

Contrary to American students, Finnish students see only one standardized test throughout their schooling, known as the Matriculation Examination (ME). Similar to graduation tests in the United States, this exam is taken at the end of a student's secondary schooling and is required for graduation and for entrance into a university. This exam has been in use in Finland for over 150 years. The exam content and structure are continually renewed and restructured with the last restructuring occurring in 2007 ("History").

The format of the ME allows for test takers to have options. According to the exam's website, the exam

> … consists of a minimum of four tests; one of them, the test in the candidate's mother tongue, is compulsory for all candidates. The candidate then chooses three other compulsory tests from among the following four tests: the test in the second national language, one foreign language test, the mathematics test, and one test in the subjects of humanities and natural sciences. One of these three compulsory tests has to be of an advanced syllabus level. ("Structure of the Examination")

Not only do Finnish students have options in the tests they want to take, but they also get to choose which exam will be of an advanced difficulty level.

Students have the option to retake portions of the exam for one of the following reasons: they passed but want to retake a test, or they failed a test and need to retake it. Students who have already passed are allowed to take the test again, with no time limit ("Structure of the Examination"). If a student fails a test and needs to retake it, they may retake the test twice given

the same time limit. If the test cannot be passed within the time restriction, they may take the test up to two times without a time restriction ("Structure of the Examination").

Within the four total tests that a student takes, they are given options with what questions they complete. For example, in the mathematics test there are three sections. The student answers all four questions in the first section, chooses three from five to answer in the second section, and chooses three from four questions in the third ("Description of Tests"). The same format applies for most of the other tests; students are given a bank of questions and required to pick a selection of them. It is unknown how much time is spent preparing for the Matriculation Examination, for both students and teachers. However, with there being only one standardized test required for all Finnish students and with the lack of consequences for school districts due to test scores, it is probable that the preparation is not to the extent of preparation in the American schools.

Standardized testing takes opposite roles in the United States and in Finland. In the U.S., standardized tests are high-stakes and consume a large portion of the year. In Finland, standardized tests are low pressure for schools and teachers and happen only once in a student's basic/secondary education. Further, the formats of the tests are completely different. The ME gives students options in the tests they want to take and the questions they want to answer. Essentially, the ME is a more individualized exam in that it allows students to be tested per their preference. Essentially, the students' test performance demonstrates their strengths. However, in the United States students are expected to answer all of the questions on a standardized test, and they have no say in what exams they take. There are many critics of standardized testing in the United States, as it does not have concrete evidence to back its "benefits." In Finland, the critics of the ME are few and far between. It is evident that the overload of testing is just not working

for the United States. It takes instructional time and places more emphasis on standardized tests than on the school curriculum and the overall learning process.

National Standards and Curriculum in the United States

The curriculum in the United States is determined through state and national standards. Common Core, a set of national standards, was put into place under the Obama Administration in 2009. A group of state leaders, along with educators, came together to create language arts and mathematics standards with the goal of all students being prepared for their life after high school no matter where they live ("Development Process"). According to the Common Core website, these standards were an attempt for the country to make academic progress. The website states, "One root cause has been an uneven patchwork of academic standards that vary from state to state and do not agree on what students should know and be able to do at each grade level" ("About the Standards"). However, not all states and territories have adopted these standards. Many of the states that adopted the Common Core standards did so in order to be eligible for grants in the Race to the Top program. The eight states and one territory that haven't adopted the Common Core have a set of state standards created by their Department of Education that teachers use to drive curriculum. Individual state standards are updated every few years and have commonalities with the Common Core. For example, the Indiana State Standards include the same set of process standards that are included within the Common Core. So, although some states vary with their standards, most students are receiving the same curriculum across the country.

As mentioned previously, private schools do not have to adhere to the same standards and curriculum as public schools. This is seen in many private schools' choice to include religious curriculum. However, there are private schools that have chosen to adhere to the Common Core

standards. Carol Thomas, the Vice President of the Office of Student Learning at Step Up For Students stated when referring to the Common Core, "It mostly tries to ensure that students are held to high standards, and that they won't get lost in the maze if they move from one school or one state to another." This reason represents not only the main goal for Common Core, but it also represents the reasoning for many states and private schools to adopt them.

National Standards and Curriculum in Finland

Similar to the United States, Finland has a national curriculum. This curriculum is determined by the Finnish National Agency for Education. However, the curriculum developed by this agency goes far beyond a simple list of standards. According to their website, the curriculum includes "the objectives and core contents of different subjects, as well as the principles of pupil assessment, special-needs education, pupil welfare and educational guidance. The principles of a good learning environment, working approaches as well as the concept of learning are also addressed in the core curriculum" ("Basic Education"). Thus, the core curriculum in Finland goes into detail on what learning environments should look like, as well as gives guidance on assessment and special education students.

The national curriculum acts as a framework for local educators; "It determines a common structure and basic guidelines that the local curriculum makers, school officials and teachers, use in order to build a local, context driven curriculum" (Vitikka 1). Thus, local educators and school officials have the power to create their own curriculum as long as it aligns to the standards set by the Finnish National Agency for Education. Flexibility with curriculum is important. It allows school officials to adjust instruction based on the school's and community's needs. Even further, this gives teachers a sense of ownership over the curriculum and aids in their commitment to implementing it (Vitikka 3).

The main struggle with the core curriculum in Finland is keeping it updated so that it aligns with how 21st century students learn (Vitikka 2). Students are constantly changing and thus the curriculum should reflect these changes. Not only is revising the curriculum a time-consuming task, but revision also goes through various levels of administration before it reaches the local level. Furthermore, Finland is still struggling with the structure of the curriculum. The structure of Finnish curriculum has always been a chronological document of plans, goals, and standards for each subject. However, "there is an on-going debate about the need for structuring the national core curriculum as a coherent model where each dimension of teaching is in balance" (Vitikka 7). Thus, curriculum has played a major role in reforming Finland's education system, but there is still progress to be made.

While there are still some struggles, Finland's core curriculum aids in their goal of having high quality schools across the country. Along with their consistent funding, Finland's national curriculum ensures that all students are receiving an equal education. No matter where students live in Finland, they are ensured that the funding spent on them is the same and that the standards, curriculum, and learning environment are the same as well.

Finland and the United States are similar when it comes to their core curriculum. Both countries have created a set of documents to guide and structure curriculum around the country. However, while the United States' Common Core is optional, Finland's core curriculum is used at every school across the country. Further, the United States' national standards are viewed as rigid whereas Finland's core curriculum acts as a framework for teachers and administrators to adhere to.

Classroom Environment in the United States

Educational policies, standardized testing, and national curriculum can affect the classroom environment and place restrictions on what teachers can and cannot do. An analysis of classroom environments includes such important aspects as assessment/grading, homework levels, school and class structure, and student stress levels.

Within the classroom, students are assessed in a variety of ways. While there is no data showing what the most common type of assessment is, many teachers and schools incorporate exams, quizzes, and homework assignments throughout the semester. During teacher preparation programs, teachers are educated on the major types of assessments: formative and summative. Teachers are encouraged to assess their students using a variety of these techniques. Formative assessment refers to ongoing assessment that allows teachers to adjust their instruction and gauge student understanding. On the other hand, summative assessment refers to assessment that comes at the end of a unit or course that gauges a students' overall understanding of the material. More often than not, summative assessments take place in some form in most classrooms.

Students' performance on the formative and summative assessments in their classes has an impact on their overall grade in the course. Most schools across the U.S. assign students a letter grade based on a criterion-referenced scale, meaning that one student's performance has no impact on another's. A common grading scale in the United States is shown below.

A (Excellent)	= 95-100	or	90-100
B (Good)	= 85-95	or	80-90
C (Fair)	= 75-85	or	70-80
D (Poor)	= 65-75	or	60-70
F (Failure)	= -65	or	-60

Source: International Affairs Office, U.S. Department of Education; *Structure of the U.S. Education System: U.S. Grading Systems*; Feb. 2008

The grading scale for schools can be set by the school district, or the teachers may have the freedom to set their own grading scale. Thus, there is no national or statewide grading system used in the United States. In some cases, teachers and schools may choose to assign a "+" or "-" to a student's letter grade, based on their work ethic or performance in the class. Overall, students' performance in a class, represented by their letter grade, affects their overall grade point average (GPA). The GPA is a weighted average of the grades received by the students and is most often on a 4.0 scale. A student's high school GPA plays a tremendous role in the furthering of their education, as most higher-level education systems have a GPA requirement. A GPA can also impact the scholarships students are given to attend a college or university. As imagined, this requirement can place stress on students when going through their course work.

Further, American students spend a substantial amount of time on homework compared to other students around the world. As of 2012, American students spent an average of 6 hours per week on homework, a statistic that remained unchanged since 2003 (OECD). While in most countries the amount of homework time is correlated with student performance, it has the opposite effect in the United States. This leads to speculations that homework is not always meaningful and does not supplement the material being taught in class. Homework is also a factor that plays into student stress levels in the United States.

Schools and classes are set up in a variety of ways across the United States and vary greatly when comparing elementary schools and high schools. Most elementary students either have one teacher that teaches all of the subjects, or switch between two teachers throughout the day. Elementary students generally start their school day later in the morning and are released later in the afternoon. On the other hand, most middle and high school students in the United States switch among 6-7 teachers who specialize in their content area. Most high school students

start school early in the morning and are released in the early afternoon. There are two common types of schedules for high schools and middle schools across the country; traditional and block scheduling. The traditional schedule consists of seven 45-minute periods a day. Students see every teacher every single day. On the other hand, the block schedule has four 90-minute periods a day, with students meeting with their teachers every other day. In other words, students meet with half their classes one day, and the other half the next day. There are pros and cons to each type of schedule. However, there is no increase in student achievement when the two types of schedules are compared (Arnold). Furthermore, students are given a passing period to get from class to class. The length of the passing period varies and mostly depends on the size of the school building. The passing period is generally a few minutes and allows for students to visit their lockers and go to the restroom between classes.

Assessments, homework, and school structure all impact a student's stress levels. In a 2014 study, the American Psychology Association (APA) found that student stress levels are higher than in years past. The report stated, "Teens are under pressure. They face a troubling outlook, reporting comparable stress levels and symptoms of stress as adults." Many teens reported that their stress levels "exceeded what they believed to be healthy." High stress levels of students affect other aspects of their lives and can affect their overall achievement in school. For example, 36% of teens "reported feeling tired because of stress in the last month," 34% reported overeating due to stress, and 23% of teens "reported skipping a meal in the last month due to stress" (Bethune).

Heightening the stress that students are facing due to their classwork, safety in schools has also become an issue across the United States. As of March 24, 2018, there have been 17 shootings on school grounds that have resulted in injury or death of at least one person (Ahmed).

The most notable of these shootings occurred in Parkland, Florida, where 17 students and adults were killed. This shooting sparked a gun-control movement across the United States but also inflicted fear among students and teachers. The classroom environment has the ability to change greatly in the coming years due to the possibility of arming teachers and administrators as a tactic against potential active threats. Feelings of unsafety in the school environment can heighten student stress levels and also hinder their ability to learn, as seen on the safety tier of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

School environments vary greatly across the country. Funding, emphasis on standardized testing, and the role of assessments are just a few factors that affect students' experiences and stress levels while going through their schooling. However, these factors can make a large impact when comparing one student's experience to another's.

Classroom Environment in Finland

An analysis of assessment and grading, homework levels, school and class structure, and student stress levels is also important when looking at the classroom environment of Finland. As with the United States, Finnish teachers utilize both formative and summative assessment. Summative assessment occurs most frequently towards the end of the school year and is used as a way for students, parents, and teachers to monitor growth throughout the year (Hendrickson). In the primary grades, testing situations are not as common as they are in the United States. However, the tests that are presented to students in the primary grades are not given in a high-stakes environment and are viewed as a growing opportunity for students and teachers (Kasanen). As students move into the higher-grade levels, their tests are either created by the teachers or taken from a blueprint from the associated textbook (Kupiainen et. al.). While Finland does not use a lot of standardized testing, they still have comparable amounts of formal

exams and tests happening within the classroom setting. In addition, formative assessments used throughout the school year are a way for teachers and students to receive immediate feedback regarding student growth. These also help teachers to make changes and adjust their future lesson plans.

Similar to the United States, student performance within the classroom impacts their overall grade in the class. Where the United States most commonly uses percentage scales, Finland's grades are based either on a 5-point, 7-point, or 10-point scale. An example of a 10-point scale is show below, as well as the translation to the U.S. letter grade.

Scale	*Grade Description*	*U.S. Grade*
10.00	Excellent	A
9.00-9.99	Very Good	A
8.00-8.99	Good	B
7.00-7.99	Acceptable	B
6.00-6.99	Fair	C
5.00-5.99	Adequate	D
4.00-4.99	Weak/Fail	F

Source: finlandeducation.info; *Grading, Language of Instruction and Academic Year in Finland*

The above scale is most commonly used among comprehensive schools and upper-secondary schools. While it is not percentage based, students are still given a "grade" that assesses their performance and progress throughout the school year. Similar to the United States, many factors may go into the final grade given to the student, depending on the set-up that the teacher has in his or her classroom.

Homework levels in Finland vary greatly, not just from the United States, but from countries across the world. As of 2012, Finnish students spent a little over two hours per week on homework (OECD). Further, student performance on PISA had little correlation with the amount of homework done by students. These results lead to speculations that Finland's success has little to do with work done outside of the classroom. The work done within the classroom is the most

important work that students complete and contributes to their overall success. These low homework levels mean that students have more time for extracurricular activities after school. Extracurricular activities contribute to a student's well-roundedness and support growth outside of a classroom environment.

Assessment and homework levels affect the structure of Finnish schools. Schools are structured differently in the lower and higher grades. The school day in the lower grades lasts from 4-6 hours beginning around 8:00 A.M. and ending between 12:00 P.M. and 2:00 P.M. Finnish schools place emphasis on learning by doing (Korpela). In the lower grades, this is seen through workshops and practical training. Students are engaged for 90-minute lessons and are given 30-minute recesses throughout the day. Additionally, lower grade students participate in chores throughout the school building that are led primarily by non-teaching staff. These chores teach students aspects of responsibility from a young age. It is safe to say that these students are engaged throughout the entire school day. The curriculum goes far beyond the standard curriculum, as seen through the chores and workshops the students participate in.

When looking at the higher grades, we see a similar design to the lower grades. The biggest contrast to most American schools is the passing period between classes. Most Finnish schools have passing periods between 15-20 minutes, allowing students time to relax and recuperate before entering their next class period. Finnish students also spend less time at school throughout the year than students in most countries around the world. According to the OECD, Finnish students spend an average of 640 hours in school each year while the average of all OECD schools is 821 hours. Finland's meaningful "learning by doing" model seems to have made an impact on the performance and retention of students. Finnish students spend less time in school and less time on homework but have higher performance than students in most countries.

The activities taking place within the classroom environment are meaningful and worthwhile to the students.

All of the aspects of classroom environment in Finland ultimately have an effect on student stress levels. A study done by PISA on their 2015 exam evaluated the overall well-being of students. One question asked demonstrates the low stress levels of Finnish students compared to the high stress levels of American students. Students were asked if they feel anxiety even when they are well prepared for a test. Of American students, 67.7% reported feeling this anxiety compared to the 48.6% of Finnish students (Anderson). Even further, a sense of competition can affect how stressed students are. Another question on the survey asked students if they wanted to be the best in their class. Only 40.8% of Finnish students wanted to be the best in their class compared to the 85.4% of American students, illustrating a difference in competitiveness in American and Finnish schools. Such competitiveness has the potential to be a key factor in the elevated stress that American students experience.

Another important comparison can be made regarding the safety of Finnish schools compared to American schools. Mentioned previously, American schools have had 17 shootings on school grounds so far in 2018. Comparatively, Finnish schools have only recorded three school shootings in history. While this is most likely due to governmental policy differences, it may play a role in the stress of students. School shootings are not as prevalent an issue in Finland as in the United States. The fear of a tragedy may not be as strong among Finnish students as it is to current American students.

Overall, Finnish schools and American schools share many similarities but have key differences. Schools in both countries follow a set curriculum and have a grading scale to follow. However, we see large contrasts when looking at homework levels and the time spent in school.

Overall, we see that most Finnish students do not experience the stress levels of American students. Low stress levels could be an underlying factor in the success of Finnish schools.

Section III: Teacher Preparation and Respect

Teachers in the United States and Finland have very different experiences when it comes to teacher preparation. Further, the respect that teachers receive in both countries varies greatly. The following section will analyze these differences.

Teacher Preparation and Respect in the United States

The certification process for teachers varies from state to state in the United States. However, these certifications look very similar and often have the same requirements. All prospective teachers must complete a Teacher Preparation Program (TPP) through a university. Most of these programs are four-year programs that result in a Bachelor's degree. However, some universities offer a five-year program that results in a Master's degree. These programs vary when comparing elementary and secondary levels. To obtain a degree in a secondary program, candidates will major in their content area of choice (i.e. math, English, chemistry, etc.). Most programs conclude with a final student teaching semester. This semester places students under a cooperating teacher in a local school district. Many programs also have opportunities for prospective teachers to enter the classroom before this final semester.

After completing a TPP, prospective teachers begin the process of obtaining their license in the state they would prefer to teach in. Requirements vary from state to state, but often include passing standardized licensure exams and CPR training. Once teachers obtain their license, most states require continual professional development or continuing of education. Professional development gives teachers the chance to further advance their skills within pedagogy and within their content area. Often, professional development opportunities are provided through the

teacher's school district, and schools will often pay for teachers to continue their education in order to get their master's degree.

While teachers must complete education programs and licensure exams, they are still not as respected as other professionals that go through similar processes. Doctors and lawyers are the most respected professions and receive pay much higher than teachers' pay. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, high school teachers had a median salary of $58,030 in 2016 whereas physicians and surgeons had a median salary of $208,000. However, the salaries of teachers are expected to increase as teaching is a continually growing profession. Salaries of teachers also vary greatly from location to location and increase with continued experience and education.

One factor that possibly impacts the respect for teachers is their evaluations. In the United States, most teachers are evaluated on a yearly, semesterly, or monthly basis by their administrators. In most cases, these evaluations are formal and provide constructive criticism for teachers. However, some schools are moving towards pay-based evaluations. This means that a teacher's evaluation can have a direct impact on their salaries. The severity of evaluations can place a great amount of stress on teachers and also create a sense of distrust from administrators and school officials. Teachers may view these constant, high-stakes evaluations as a lack of respect for their profession.

The United States is also experiencing a teacher shortage. It's unclear whether this shortage is due to lack of respect or lack of sufficient funds, but it is likely that these two aspects play a role. According to the American Association for Employment in Education, math, science, and special education are the three areas experiencing the greatest shortages across the country (AAEE 69). Educators in these subjects have more options when searching for teaching jobs and

often have less competition. While this is good for prospective teachers, a shortage has the ability to harm students and schools, especially those in poor areas. Schools and states often have to resort to drastic measures in order to ensure they have enough teachers in the school buildings. For example, teachers who have not completed their license requirements may be given an "emergency license" that allows them to teach while they complete their requirements. Even further, some states have created programs that allow people from other professions to teach without a degree in education. Indiana, for example, has created a bill that "will allow someone without a bachelor's degree, but who has at least 10,000 hours of experience in a particular content area in the preceding seven years and who has passed a content exam, to be permitted to teach under Indiana's career specialist permit" (Indiana State Teachers Association). This portrays the message that someone only needs to know a specific content area and not how to teach. However, many teachers would argue that knowing how to teach the content is much more important than simply knowing the content. New laws such as the one above also play a role in the respect for teachers.

Teacher Preparation and Respect in Finland

Teacher preparation and respect in Finland look very different than preparation and respect in the United States. For starters, prospective Finnish educators are required to obtain their Master's degree and are encouraged to continue their education to pursue their Doctorates (Kupiainen et. al.). Moreover, where America is experiencing a teacher shortage, only 10% to 15% of prospective teachers are accepted into TPPs in Finland (Kupiainen et. al.). Thus, the field is highly competitive and difficult to get admitted into. The admission process is different across universities, but many have admission exams that assess study habits and ability to fit into the profession ("Teacher Education in Finland"). Further, universities can decide their own

curriculum for teacher education but most follow the same general idea. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture, "the objective is to produce teachers with a research orientation in their work who are capable of independent problem-solving and have the capacity to utilize the most recent research in the fields of education and the subjects taught" ("Teacher Education in Finland"). Ultimately, the goal of teacher education in Finland is to produce educators who believe in life-long learning for themselves by engraining the importance of research within teaching and content.

As for continuing education, teachers are required to do in-service training each year. According to the Finnish National Agency for Education, teachers view this training as a privilege and actively participate. Each school is required to provide, at minimum, three working days outside of the school year ("Teacher Education in Finland"). The Ministry of Education and Culture also provides in-service training so that all educators are receiving equal opportunities.

The high level of education needed for teaching in Finland combined with the competitiveness of the field results in a high level of respect for the profession. Teachers are respected at the same level as lawyers and doctors. However, teacher pay is even less in Finland than it is in the United States, despite their high respect levels. For example, a primary teacher with 15 years of experience makes USD$40,531 and an upper secondary teacher with the same experience makes USD$47,252 (OECD).

Teacher preparation and respect are different in most aspects when comparing the United States and Finland. The preparation programs are polar opposites; the United States' TPPs require lower levels of education and struggle to produce enough teachers to match the demand, while Finland requires high levels of education and only accepts 10%-15% of their applicants. Further, teachers in Finland are highly respected whereas teachers in the United States do not get

the respect they deserve. However, in both countries, teacher salaries are low, but higher in the United States than in Finland.

Section IV: Closing Remarks

This paper has analyzed the many similarities and differences within the education systems of the United States and Finland. While these similarities and differences are no doubt interesting and important, it is important to be careful when drawing concrete conclusions. The demographic, size, and overall governmental policies are drastically different in the two countries. These factors have an effect on the general attitude of the population and their active role in education. Rather than drawing hard conclusions from these similarities and differences, it is more beneficial to summarize the lessons that the countries can learn from each other. Education is a continuous learning experience and should involve self-reflection from both teachers and students. Finland has created a top-notch education system, and teachers, administrators, and government officials in the United States can take notice.

With all factors considered, I believe the most important lesson that any country can learn from Finland is the sense of trust they have created. Finland feels no need to incorporate incentive-based and high-stakes standardized tests nor do they find it necessary to constantly evaluate their teachers. They trust the system they have in place. They trust their teachers to teach, and to teach well. They trust that schools and administrators are allocating funds to where they need to go. An education system based on trust is not one that forms overnight. Finland initiated reforms for decades that fit the needs and values of their citizens. While the process was time-consuming and most likely challenging, their hard work and dedication to education has paid off. Meanwhile, the United States has yet to enact this change.

Further, my own research and beliefs indicate that the funding issue in the United States is the underlying factor that needs to change. This funding creates an abundance of inequality across the country, within states, and even throughout cities. The large emphasis on funding from the local governments results in poorer communities having poorly equipped schools. This can be seen in the quality and outdatedness of resources and in the quality of teachers. The education that a child receives at one school can be a world of difference compared that of a child in another school. Thus, I believe the United States needs to come up with a way to fund schools that is proportional to the number of students the school serves. In this way, students are receiving an equal amount of funding wherever they go, and their funding is not dependent on the wealth of their surrounding community.

The issue of funding is the root of the differences between the United States and Finland. The funding in the United States has created a competitive environment across and within states. Not only do states have to fight for funding from the federal government, but the local governments have to fight for funding from their own states. In most situations, this fight for funding comes in the form of standardized tests. It is simple: those who perform better receive more funding. However, we have seen that wealthier communities tend to do better, which means that poorer communities are at a disadvantage. In Finland, however, schools do not have to stress over receiving more or less funding since their funding is proportional to the number of students they have. There are no competitions, no "races", and no inequalities due to funding.

In conclusion, I believe that the exact system Finland has in place would not work in the United States. As I mentioned previously, the two countries are vastly different in terms of demographics, size, and overall beliefs. Finland has ideas within their system that the United States can take lessons from, but it would not work to simply duplicate their education system. If

anything, comparing the two countries has made it clear that the United States needs to enact positive change. Inequalities in schools, standardized testing, and immense homework levels are just a few factors that are causing strain on the education system in the U.S. I believe the United States needs to start by fixing the major issue of funding. The system cannot continue to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. Further, funding should be going directly into the education system, not for-profit corporations. Education should not be used for profit purposes. Education is the foundation of progress, growth, and success to any country, population, or individual citizen. Using education as a means to produce a profit does a disservice to our nation's youth.

While every system has its flaws, Finland has shown the ability to start from scratch and identify methods that meet the needs of its citizens. The United States can use this idea to work towards changing their education system so that all students, no matter their location or socioeconomic status, are receiving a high-quality education.

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